Amendment Conference of the States Parties to the Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and under Water

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Held at United Nations Headquarters, New York,
on Thursday, 10 January 1991, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. ALATAS (Indonesia)

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General debate (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (continued)

1. Mr. HAYES (Ireland) said his Government believed that the conclusion of a comprehensive test-ban treaty was an urgent necessity. That was because of its view that true security could not be based on mutual fear deriving from military rivalry. In order to change that situation, there must be an approach to security based on the building of confidence among nations and the removal of the fear of attack. In that context, the elimination of nuclear weapons was of primary importance.

2. Recent developments in international relations, especially the relaxation of East-West tensions, seemed to indicate that the potential offered by a co-operative approach to security was increasingly being recognized. In the European context, the signing of the Charter of Paris for a New Europe at the Paris Summit Meeting of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe in November 1990, the unprecedented agreement on the reduction of conventional armed forces in Europe, and the package of security- and confidence-building measures presented to the Summit Meeting provided good examples of such a co-operative approach to security.

3. The world now had a unique opportunity to move away from an approach to security based on nuclear deterrence. His delegation considered that at the present juncture in international relations, the arguments in favour of a comprehensive test-ban treaty were particularly compelling and relevant. Firstly, a comprehensive test-ban treaty was the most important step required to halt the qualitative nuclear-arms race, in other words, the development of new and more destructive weapons. While the quantitative growth in the nuclear arsenals of the nuclear-weapon States had apparently halted, qualitative development of those weapons and of their delivery vehicles was continuing and could continue under the terms of the START Treaty. Secondly, it had to be admitted that there were no grounds for arguing that testing of nuclear weapons was necessary to ensure their continued reliability, for their reliability could be ensured without recourse to further testing. Thirdly, the problem of ensuring reliable verification, which had been presented as an obstacle to the negotiation of a comprehensive test-ban treaty, was no longer insoluble.

4. The Ad Hoc Group of Scientific Experts to Consider International Co-operative Measures to Detect and Identify Seismic Events was carrying out extremely useful work on the development of an international seismic monitoring network. Other verification techniques, such as satellite photography, monitoring of airborne radioactive materials and hydrodynamic measurement, had been identified as measures which would contribute to the development of confidence in a comprehensive test-ban treaty. The draft verification protocol circulated by the sponsors of the amendment proposal also emphasized on-site inspection.

5. Fourthly, a comprehensive test-ban treaty would provide a real barrier to the further horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons, as well as to the proliferation

(Mr. Hayes, Ireland)

of more sophisticated and destructive thermonuclear weapons, which could not be developed without testing. In that context, his Government believed that a halt to testing, followed by a rapid conclusion of a comprehensive test-ban treaty, would be the clearest proof which the nuclear-weapon States could offer of their commitment to complete nuclear disarmament and of their determination to control the qualitative development of the nuclear-arms race. Total prohibition of nuclear testing should be seen as the first step towards disarmament - not as the final stage, to be undertaken only after the other elements of disarmament had been agreed. A universal production cut-off in weapons-grade fissionable material was also required.

6. The key question at the current Conference was how a comprehensive test-ban treaty could best be achieved. His delegation believed that the Conference on Disarmament was the best forum for discussion of that issue. All the nuclear-weapon States participated in the Conference on Disarmament, although all were not parties to the partial test-ban Treaty. However, discussions in the current Amendment Conference and in the Conference on Disarmament did not have to be mutually exclusive. The current Conference could give an impetus to the work under way in the Conference on Disarmament, and could undertake useful work on the verification issue, in particular by considering and refining, if necessary, the draft verification protocol submitted by the sponsors of the amendment.

7. Mr. HOHENFELLNER (Austria) said that the conclusion of the partial nuclear-test-ban Treaty in 1963 had been a step forward in arms-control and disarmament efforts. In the assessment of the general framework of the Treaty régime, one had to bear in mind that the Treaty limited itself to the prohibition of nuclear-weapon tests or any other nuclear explosions in the atmosphere, in outer space and under water, including the territorial waters and the high seas. Nuclear tests or explosions in any other environment were prohibited only if they caused radioactive debris to be present outside the territorial limits of the State under whose jurisdiction or control such explosions were conducted. The limits of the existing régime were obvious. No verification provisions were incorporated. Furthermore, at the time of the conclusion of the Treaty, agreement had not been reached on the prohibition of underground testing or on verification, because the then prevailing environmental interests had been limited to above-ground testing. In addition, no quantitative or qualitative thresholds for permissible nuclear testing had been adopted. Such shortcomings in the partial test-ban Treaty clearly showed the need for a more elaborate and comprehensive system in order to deal with all related problems.

8. Major progress could be achieved in the framework of the Group of Scientific Experts, which had been established in 1976, to deal with the technical aspects of verification and the feasibility of a global seismological monitoring network to detect any major underground tremors. Such a monitoring system would constitute the corner-stone of the verification régime of a comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty. The re-establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee on a Nuclear Test Ban at the Conference on Disarment was also an encouraging sign for the possible early conclusion of such a treaty.

(Mr. Hohenfellner, Austria)

9. The halting of nuclear-weapon tests in the context of non-proliferation was another important issue to be dealt with. In that regard, the recent Fourth Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons demonstrated the close relationship between the two subjects, even though divergent positions with regard to a comprehensive test-ban treaty had made it impossible to reach agreement on a final document. Since nuclear-weapon testing was mainly related to the modernization of nuclear weapons, the complete halting of all nuclear tests would bring about a major breakthrough in efforts to stop the nuclear-arms race and promote vertical and horizontal non-proliferation. The question of halting nuclear-weapon tests should also be considered in the wider framework of general and complete disarmament.

10. The current Conference provided the opportunity to review the functioning of the partial test-ban Treaty and draw conclusions about a future comprehensive régime. It could also make a political contribution to efforts to achieve a comprehensive test ban and promote greater awareness of that issue on the part of the international community. In that context, his delegation welcomed the participation of the large number of non-governmental organizations at the Conference. Lastly, the Amendment Conference should elaborate concrete proposals for consideration by the Conference on Disarmament. The political will to solve outstanding verification-related questions would be of great importance. That was especially true for the consideration of concrete questions concerning the overall pattern of verification and the interrelationship between its different aspects, such as the global seismological network, exchange of information, on-site inspection, technical means of verification and so forth. In order to ensure the effective implementation of the future comprehensive test-ban treaty, improved international co-operation and adequate financial means were necessary. Consultations with States which were not parties to the Treaty should be intensified in order to ensure universal adherence to the partial test-ban Treaty and the future comprehensive test-ban treaty. In that connection, the Conference on Disarmament should redouble its efforts to resolve the outstanding issues.

11. Mr. AKSIN (Turkey) said that the Amendment Conference was taking place at a time of dramatic transformations in the international political arena. The momentous developments in Europe had fundamentally changed the nature of East-West relations. That in turn had created a political environment conducive to progress in the field of arms control and disarmament. The Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, signed in Paris in November 1990, and the new set of confidence- and security-building measures adopted at the CSCE Paris Summit had laid the foundation for a new era of co-operation in a region extending from the Atlantic to the Urals. In the field of nuclear disarmament, the historic INF Treaty was expected to be complemented shortly by the START Agreement, which would entail significant reductions in the strategic nuclear arsenals of the two major nuclear-weapon States. In that context, the Geneva negotiations on a global and complete ban on chemical weapons were of utmost importance.

12. With regard to the issue of a nuclear-test ban, his delegation shared the view that progress in the various fields of disarmament would contribute to the eventual

(Mr. Aksin, Turkey)

achievement of a comprehensive test ban. His country viewed disarmament as an integrated process encompassing multiple interrelated elements, including nuclear, conventional and chemical weapons, together with the necessary verification mechanisms and confidence- and security-building measures.

13. Turkey supported the goal of halting all nuclear-weapon tests for all time and noted with satisfaction that the Conference on Disarmament at its 1990 summer session had reached agreement on a mandate for the Ad Hoc Committee on a Nuclear Test Ban. His delegation looked forward to the re-establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee at the beginning of the 1991 session of the Conference on Disarmament. The Ad Hoc Committee had to carry out substantive work on issues related to a comprehensive test ban, inter alia, the vital question of verification and compliance. He also wished to pay tribute to the Group of Scientific Experts, which had achieved considerable progress towards the establishment of a global network for the monitoring and exchange of seismic data. The network would be an important element in the future verification system of a comprehensive test-ban treaty.

14. He hoped that at the current Conference there would be a constructive exchange of views on various aspects of the test-ban issue, which would make it possible to focus attention on the search for mutually acceptable solutions, rather than on the differences which existed among the States parties to the partial test-ban Treaty.

15. Mr. GHEZAL (Tunisia) said that the Amendment Conference was being conducted at a time marked by the end of the "cold war" and the strengthening of détente and sincerely hoped that the spirit of co-operation, which had led to considerable progress in the field of disarmament and arms control both on a bilateral and a multilateral basis, would also be reflected in the work of the Conference and make it possible to achieve positive results.

16. It would hardly have been possible to conclude the 1963 Moscow Treaty, if the non-nuclear-weapon countries, particularly the non-aligned ones, had not called for a nuclear test ban. Unfortunately, it had not been possible to achieve a complete ban at that time and, furthermore, the Treaty had not provided for verification measures which would ensure its implementation. As a result, underground nuclear explosions continued to be conducted: according to data provided by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, since the signing of the Treaty 1,237 underground tests had been carried out, not to mention undeclared or unregistered explosions. In addition, 64 nuclear tests in the atmosphere had been registered.

17. Today, as never in the past, all States must demonstrate political will and seriously undertake the building of a non-violent world, free of nuclear weapons. As early as 1972, the Secretary-General, on the basis of a detailed analysis of the scientific and technical aspects of the problem of nuclear-weapon tests, had expressed confidence that a political decision would suffice in order to ban them definitively. Subsequently, the Secretary-General had repeatedly pointed out that the conclusion of a comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty would constitute convincing proof of a real desire for nuclear disarmament.

(Mr. Ghezal, Tunisia)

18. In the view of specialists in the field of disarmament, existing technical possibilities made it feasible to halt nuclear tests in the atmosphere and replace them with laboratory tests. In that connection, it was becoming a matter of priority to step up negotiations aimed at a complete test ban, which would be a significant obstacle to both the vertical and horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons and help strengthen the Treaty itself.

19. It should be stressed that in a world dedicated to the philosophy of equitable relations among States, the continued possession of nuclear weapons by some of them inevitably motivated others to follow their example. At the same time, it was common knowledge that when there were gigantic arsenals of both nuclear and conventional weapons, no State would be able to escape the terrible consequences resulting from their use. Accordingly, the very survival of mankind increasingly depended on speedy general and complete disarmament.

20. The vicious circle of conducting tests to verify the reliability of nuclear weapons was completed with the development of new, improved, more destructive and more lethal types of nuclear weapons. A comprehensive nuclear-test ban in all environments therefore would be a way of depriving States of the possibility of verifying the quality of their arsenals and would significantly lessen the desire of non-nuclear-weapon States to acquire such weapons.

21. Environmental pollution resulting from nuclear tests was also a cause of great concern for all mankind. Over the course of many years, the countries of Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Latin America had advocated declaring their regions nuclear-weapon-free zones. At its forty-fifth session, the General Assembly had adopted a resolution prohibiting the dumping of toxic and radioactive wastes on the African continent, which demonstrated the extreme importance attached to the link between ensuring disarmament and environmental protection.

22. The reduced tension in East-West relations was today opening up new opportunities for taking political and diplomatic measures aimed at ensuring the security of the countries that ranked low in the hierarchy of military strength. His delegation considered that a comprehensive nuclear-test ban was an important integral part of the general process of arms limitation and disarmament and hoped that the current Conference would help promote constructive dialogue and mutual understanding, leading to the adoption of the proposed amendment to the Treaty.

23. Mr. RANA (Nepal) said that the current Conference was taking place at a decisive moment in the history of international relations. The "cold war" had finally come to an end and a new international order was being established. There was reason to hope that the issues of international peace, security and stability would now be pursued democratically and with a global perspective. The INF Treaty, prospects for the conclusion of an agreement on significant reductions in the strategic offensive weapons of the two super-Powers, the recently concluded agreement on conventional forces in Europe, the strengthening of the CSCE process, the rejection of a doctrinaire approach to relations between States and the growing tide of pluralism had reinforced hopes for a stable and democratic world order.

(Mr. Rana, Nepal)

The Amendment Conference was providing yet another historic opportunity to strengthen the process of building a safer and more peaceful world.

24. An equitable international security system could be predicated only on the cessation of the nuclear-arms race and the elimination of nuclear weapons. The adoption of measures to halt the qualitative improvement and development of new systems of nuclear weapons and prevent their proliferation would be the first steps towards that goal. With that in mind, a majority of the members of the international community had, for more than three decades, been pursuing the goal of a comprehensive treaty on the complete prohibition of all nuclear-weapon tests in all environments. The 1963 partial test-ban Treaty had been the first global step towards nuclear disarmament. One should not, however, forget that that Treaty set forth the obligations of the nuclear-weapon States parties to seek to achieve a comprehensive test ban and continue negotiations to that end. It was therefore difficult to understand why after almost three decades of trilateral and bilateral negotiations, some major Powers were now speaking of a comprehensive test ban only as a long-term objective. The failure to make any progress towards a comprehensive test ban clearly jeopardized the future of the non-proliferation Treaty. That was clear from the results of the Fourth Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in 1990.

25. He expressed deep gratitude to non-governmental organizations around the world. Their valuable work had created a well-informed public opinion on the need to achieve a comprehensive test ban at an early date.

26. His delegation welcomed the re-establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee on a Nuclear Test Ban at the Conference on Disarmament in 1990. He earnestly hoped that the Conference on Disarmament would once again establish the Ad Hoc Committee in 1991 with a clear negotiating mandate.

27. The question of reliable verification had long held up negotiations in that field. Nevertheless, the results of studies by experts had conclusively established that the lack of credible verification techniques for a comprehensive test ban was no longer an impediment. The Group of Scientific Experts at the Conference on Disarmament had carried out important work in that regard.

28. The pursuit of a comprehensive test ban in a multilateral forum in no way diminished the importance of the bilateral negotiations that had already produced very important results. The ratification of the verification protocols to the threshold test-ban Treaty and the peaceful nuclear explosions Treaty had established the technical possibility of verification. Furthermore, the six initiators of the Amendment Conference as well as Australia and New Zealand had put forward proposals for consideration by the participants in the Conference. Those proposals deserved careful study.

29. The question of a comprehensive test ban was immensely complex and touched on the fundamental security perceptions of some States. His delegation also believed that the end of the cold war called for a new thinking and for greater willingness

(Mr. Rana, Nepal)

to compromise. As a firm supporter of the early conclusion of a comprehensive test-ban treaty, Nepal believed that the current Conference offered yet another necessary forum to examine the issue in all its aspects. While it would not be realistic to expect to achieve a comprehensive test ban in two weeks, the current Conference could be made an integral part of the ongoing efforts at various levels towards the same goal. Given the political will, it would be possible, at the Conference, to agree on measures to continue negotiations.

30. Mr. ADEYEMI (Nigeria) said that by its very nature and scope, the partial test-ban Treaty had been the first real disarmament treaty. It was quite significant that the Treaty contained the commitment by the depositary Powers to seek, with maximum speed, a comprehensive test ban through further negotiations.

31. The special importance of the Amendment Conference derived not only from the unique character of adherence to the Treaty, but also from the fact that the question of a comprehensive test ban had consistently been on the agenda of the General Assembly, and of many other multilateral disarmament bodies. Nigeria hoped that the depositaries of the partial test-ban Treaty would participate constructively in the Amendment Conference.

32. The Conference reflected the failure of the three depositary Powers to live up to their obligations under the partial test-ban Treaty, the threshold test-ban Treaty and the non-proliferation Treaty. It also reflected the failure of the Conference on Disarmament and bilateral, trilateral or other negotiating forums to achieve a comprehensive test ban over the years.

33. The history of the Conference on Disarmament, the only multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament, reflected the many failures and the frustration over the lack of progress towards a comprehensive test ban. Even as late as July 1990, the Conference on Disarmament had established an Ad Hoc Committee on a Nuclear Test Ban, but it had failed to gain a negotiating mandate on a comprehensive test-ban treaty.

34. No time was more appropriate than the present time to focus international attention on the question of a comprehensive ban on nuclear-weapon testing. Since the organizational meeting for the current Conference in June 1990, there had been a number of developments - democratic transformations in Eastern Europe, the unification of Germany, the reintegration of Europe, the cessation of ideological confrontation between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, the end of the cold war, and the official proclamation of a new world order.

35. Nigeria had long appreciated how valuable a nuclear-test ban would be to the peace, security and environment of poor, weak and defenceless nations. The fact that South Africa, through its acquisition of nuclear weapons, had frustrated regional efforts to make Africa a nuclear-weapon-free zone, further reinforced Africa's overwhelming support for the partial test-ban Treaty and the non-proliferation Treaty, whose ultimate objective was the realization of a global, effective and verifiable comprehensive test ban.

(Mr. Adeyemi, Nigeria)

36. Nuclear weapons did not promote and could not guarantee any nation's security. If they did, there would be no need for the nuclear-weapon States to continue adding to the existing nuclear weapons in their arsenals. If vertical proliferation by the nuclear Powers continued, horizontal proliferation by additional States would also proceed apace, with greater threats to international security and the security of the nuclear Powers themselves.

37. Nigeria strongly believed that the unique opportunity of the favourable international climate and the end of the cold war should be seized in order to achieve a comprehensive test ban without further delay. Since the advent of nuclear weapons and the pursuit of the nuclear-arms race were products of the Second World War and its attendant cold war, the effective end of the cold war should be used to begin taking real steps towards the elimination of those weapons before the end of the century. The advantages of a comprehensive test-ban treaty within the framework of the Amendment Conference were enormous: the three Powers that were the depositaries of both the partial test-ban Treaty and the non-proliferation Treaty would be living up to their obligations; a comprehensive test-ban treaty would put an end to the discriminatory nature of the non-proliferation Treaty; it would be a decisive step towards curbing the vertical and horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons; it would halt the emergence of new, third-generation nuclear weapons; it would mark an unprecedented global pronouncement on one of the most important disarmament issues of the day. In short, a comprehensive test-ban treaty would accelerate the emergence of a new world order based on common security and the abandonment of the threat or use of force in international relations, and foster disarmament measures in other key spheres, including the early multilateral prohibition of chemical, biological and other weapons of mass destruction.

38. His delegation had no illusion that a comprehensive test-ban treaty could be achieved during the two weeks allocated for the Amendment Conference. There were several vital questions of verification and compliance which needed to be addressed, including the structure and functions of control, institutional mechanisms, legal issues of relationships to existing treaties, review procedures, financial aspects, and the question of securing adherence of all the nuclear Powers and non-nuclear-weapon States to a comprehensive test-ban treaty. It was hardly possible to discuss all those issues in the current forum in two weeks. His delegation believed that there was an obvious need to keep the amendment initiative alive in the Conference by exercising certain options, including the establishment of a standing working group or committee that would be mandated by the Conference to continue serious negotiations after the recess. In addition, a future session of the Amendment Conference should be envisaged for the near future, possibly in 1992, in order to take stock of negotiations and give the necessary political impetus.

39. The current Conference had a duty to stand firm against any attempt, subtle or overt, to shift the focus of attention or future action to the Conference on Disarmament or any other limited negotiating forum. The Amendment Conference was the most viable negotiating forum for the achievement of a test ban. Nigeria

(Mr. Adeyemi, Nigeria)

called on the three depositary Powers to suspend all nuclear testing for the period of negotiations within the framework of the Amendment Conference, until a comprehensive test-ban treaty was concluded. It also called on the Soviet Union, which, of those three nuclear Powers, had been the leading proponent of a comprehensive test ban, to declare a unilateral moratorium on all nuclear tests from January 1991 until 1995, so as to intensify international pressure and increase the momentum for a comprehensive test-ban treaty.

40. Mr. TAYLHARDAT (Venezuela) said that at the adoption of the Moscow Treaty in 1963, the only three nuclear Powers signing the Treaty had pledged to promote the cessation of underground testing. Twenty-seven years had since elapsed, but that commitment, like others, had not yet been honoured. There had been a definite change for the better in 1977, with the achievement of an agreement in principle on a number of major issues, but in the few years since, the trilateral negotiations had come to a standstill.

41. The problem of verification had for some time constituted a major obstacle to talks. It was now known that, with the help of existing technical devices, the nature and origin of any seismic event could be ascertained with a minimum degree of error. In addition, the two major nuclear Powers had agreed to the idea of on-site inspection, which definitely meant significant progress in the elaboration of other indirect means of control and verification. The view was now being expressed that the idea of nuclear deterrence must still be retained, that tests could not be abandoned and that a comprehensive nuclear-test ban was a long-term objective which could only be achieved step by step. It was surprising that such arguments should be advanced at a time when the international situation had changed radically, when the "cold war" had given way to co-operation and mutual understanding between the super-Powers and the concept of nuclear deterrence had already lost its prior significance.

42. His country believed that the achievement of a test ban was an urgent task of paramount importance. The reasons were, firstly, that underground nuclear explosions also caused radioactive pollution of the atmosphere and, secondly, that underground testing played a considerable part in prolonging the nuclear arms race by making it possible to develop new and more effective forms of weapons. Underground nuclear tests were therefore one of the major factors behind horizontal proliferation.

43. The task of achieving a complete test ban was twofold. On the one hand, the nuclear Powers must be persuaded to change their position and to accept that testing must be stopped; on the other, it was necessary to elaborate a sufficiently effective and reliable system of verification. There could of course be no guarantee of 100-per-cent reliability, but it would be possible to establish a sufficiently effective system of verification for each country to be assured that others were also conscientiously abiding by their commitments.

44. It was essential that the current Conference should constitute a decisive step forwards on the path to achieving the desired goal. It would obviously not be

(Mr. Taylhardat, Venezuela)

possible to make any amendment to the Treaty so long as it remained necessary, to solve a whole array of complicated legal, technical and political issues, in order to eliminate all the obstacles which had arisen over the last 27 years. It was, however, vital that a firm commitment should be made at the Conference to continue talks on the question of a comprehensive nuclear-test ban.

45. Mr. ERDOS (Hungary) said that the 1963 Treaty was the first practical step to curb nuclear testing. It had, however, proved ineffective. The figure of over 1,300 nuclear-test explosions since the signing of the Treaty spoke for itself.

46. His country had always consistently called for a ban on all nuclear explosions in all environments. A treaty on a comprehensive nuclear-test ban would put an end to the continuous modernization of nuclear weapons, which fuelled the qualitative arms race. It would be instrumental in preventing the spread of nuclear weapons and would strengthen the existing non-proliferation régime.

47. The current Conference could and should become an important landmark on the route to the conclusion of a Treaty on a comprehensive nuclear-test ban by creating and upholding a constructive dialogue and atmosphere for further practical steps in that direction in the framework of the Conference on Disarmament at Geneva. All the nuclear-weapon States were represented at the Conference on Disarmament, and it was in that forum that they could make their contribution to the achievement of the desired goal. Further progress could be made to that end if the nuclear-weapon States were to decide to reduce the number and yield of their test explosions. It was also important at the current Conference to avoid any political, organizational or procedural decisions which might jeopardize or weaken the partial test-ban Treaty and the existing non-proliferation régime.

48. The toughest problem at talks on a nuclear-test ban was the problem of verification. The nuclear-weapon States which maintained that a comprehensive test ban was a long-term objective, to be preceded by substantial and verifiable arms reductions, also held the view that the conclusion of a comprehensive test-ban Treaty required greatly improved verification capabilities. A completely new approach to the question of verification had emerged in recent years, with the result that verification of compliance with such a Treaty was no longer so much a political as a technical issue. In addition to seismic means of verification, it was possible to begin elaborating a complex and reliable system by which to verify a future Treaty, and interesting suggesions to that effect had been submitted in the course of the Conference.

49. His delegation was firmly convinced that with good will and flexibility towards the positions of other parties, it was possible to solve the problems relating to a comprehensive test ban.

50. Mr. GISLASON (Iceland) noted that the question of a comprehensive nuclear-test ban had long been high on the priority list of United Nations disarmament issues. The various treaties concluded in that area had had a considerable positive impact on international security and environmental protection. The remaining unresolved issue was that of underground nuclear explosions with yields of up to 150 kilotons.

(Mr. Gislason, Iceland)

51. In the context of the East-West arms race, the prevalent attitude was that a test ban would slow down the nuclear arms race and the development of nuclear weapons. With the end of the "cold war" and the introduction of deep cuts in arsenals of both conventional and nuclear weapons, the significance of a comprehensive test ban lay primarily in its capacity to strengthen the non-proliferation régime, which had significantly contributed to international stability and security. Given that the further proliferation of nuclear weapons was labelled as the main security challenge of the 1990s, his country considered the non-proliferation Treaty to be the single most important multilateral agreement on disarmament.

52. Technically speaking, a test ban might hold back the development of more sophisticated types of nuclear arms but would not prevent their production. On the other hand, a ban would put pressure on all States not to test nuclear weapons and might persuade the so-called "threshold" States to refrain from developing and acquiring such weapons, which would also curb the qualitative competition in nuclear weaponry.

53. A test ban would also facilitate provision of the necessary support for a substantial extension of the non-proliferation Treaty. However, despite the evident political relationship between non-proliferation and a comprehensive test ban, his country believed that a deliberate linkage of progress towards a comprehensive test ban to an extension and strengthening of the non-proliferation régime might endanger that régime and produce the opposite of the desired effect.

54. A ban would alleviate concerns about the environmental consequences of nuclear testing, which were a source of particular anxiety for peoples living in the far north.

55. The 1987 agreement between the Soviet Union and the United States to adopt a step-by-step approach and the specific results obtained on that basis appeared to show that, if an immediate test ban was not feasible, a phased approach would certainly be preferable to a standstill.

56. In that connection, his country suggested that, in addition to limiting the number of tests and the yield of permitted explosions, consideration might also be given to the question of test areas and the possibility of excluding such tests in the vicinity of densely populated and ecologically vulnerable areas.

57. If it were to prove possible to convert the partial test-ban Treaty into a comprehensive test ban, amendments must be adopted by consensus. His delegation hoped that the current Conference would give a political boost to the work of the Conference on Disarmament and thus contribute constructively towards the goal of a comprehensive nuclear-test ban.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.